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A
SERMON

Preach'd at the

FUNERAL

Of the Honourable

ELIZABETH NOEL, &c.



The CHRISTIAN VICTORY.

A
S E R M O N,

Preach'd at the
FUNERAL of the Honourable
ELIZABETH NOEL,

Sister to the Right Honourable
Baptist, late Earl of Gainsborough.

A T T H E
Parish-Church of *EXTON*, in the
County of *RUTLAND*, November the
First, 1715.

By *JOHN ISAAC, M. A.*
Rector of Ashwel, Domestick Chaplain to the Rt.
Honourable Dorothy, Countess of Gainsbo-
rough, and Tutor to her Son, the present Earl of
Gainsborough.

L O N D O N:
Printed for HENRY CLEMENTS, at the *Half-*
Moon in *St. Paul's Church-yard.* 1715.

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To the Honourable

SUSANNA NOEL.

Madam,

AS Your Command was a sufficient Motive for the Printing of this Discourse, so 'tis I hope, a sufficient Apology for it's Waiting upon Your Ladyship in this publick manner. It belongs indeed to You by a double Right; both as you are the Sister, and as you are Executrix to the Excellent Lady at whose Funeral it was Preach'd. Your Ladyship will here find neither more nor less than just your Due; the Printed Sermon being Word for Word the same that was deliver'd at that sorrowful Solemnity: For if I had made it Longer, I am sensible I shou'd have added to the number of it's Faults; and had I
made

The DEDICATION.

made it any Shorter, I shou'd have defrauded your Ladyship of some part of your Right and Title.

I shall not at this time entertain your Ladyship with a long Detail of your own high Perfections ; You are above the Censure of the World, and can no more be supposed to value my Praises, than you can be thought to stand in need of my Flattery. Besides ; your Ladyship is at present too much overwhelm'd with Sorrow to listen to such ill-tim'd Panegyrick ; nor can I think but it wou'd sound as absurdly in your Ears, as a brisk Air upon a Violin wou'd in the midst of a Funeral Ceremony.

*Forgive me, Madam, the flatness of this Allusion, and indulge me but a Word or two more and I have done ; And that is, to take notice to your Ladyship of a Popular Notion that has obtain'd in these Parts, viz. That the Vault belonging to your Noble Family is never opened under the Ex-
pence*

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pence of two or three Funerals. Tho' I confess my self to have but a slender Opinion of such Vulgar Conceits, yet it must be own'd that it has of late proved to be too fatally true: For we had scarce dried our Tears for the most Pious and Illustrious Master of the Family your Brother, but they again burst out afresh for the two most Vertuous Ladies, the Mother and the Sister. This is God's doing, and (as all his Works are) is marvellous in our Eyes; This Sorrow upon Sorrow must needs be a severe trial of your Ladyship's Patience: But as the Affliction is great and astonishing, so will your Glory be also if you can conquer such Difficulties with a true Christian Courage and Resolution.

'Tis well known, that your Ladyship has by this late stroke of Providence obtain'd a double share of this World's Goods, so we don't doubt, but we shall see a proportionable Improvement in Good Works. And as the Fortune of the Deceased Lady is
now

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now devolved upon You, so 'tis my Prayer to Almighty God that He wou'd be pleas'd to Enrich Your Ladyship with a double Portion of her excellent Spirit. And may you go down late, very late, to your Departed Ancestors; For since we can no longer be blest'd with the bright ORIGINAL, it will be no small Alleviation of our Grief, that we have still amongst us so shining and perfect a Copy.

I am, with the greatest Respect,

M A D A M,

Your Ladyship's most Obliged

and most Humble Servant,

John Isaac.

I COR. xv. 55.

O Death, where is thy Sting? O Grave, where
is thy Victory?



It has been the Custom of all Nations (that have yet come to our Knowledge) to appoint Funeral Rites and Solemnities for the Dead. And however Unciviliz'd they have been in other Respects, yet there are no People so Barbarous but, according to the Mode of the Country they lived in, have had their Solemn Ceremonies at the Decease of their departed Friends and Acquaintance. That the Gentile or Pagan World observ'd this Method, their own Writers frequently testify; and we accordingly find very beautiful and pompous Descriptions of the same in *Homer* and the Ancient Poets. The People of God too practis'd the same at their Interments, as we find sufficiently illustrated by the old Examples of *Abraham* and the Patriarchs. And that such Customs, when perform'd with a seriousness suitable to such melancholy Occasions, are not only Decent in their own Nature, but also pleasing to God, we may make a probable conjecture from the Funeral of *Moses*, who was buried by no less a Person than the Almighty himself. In conformity to the Custom of the Country, our blessed Saviour in like manner permitted his own Body to be Embalm'd, and to be laid in the Tomb with the pious and decent attendance of some of his Acquaintance

tance and Followers ; for the religious Women that follow'd him to his Cross, no less religiously follow'd him to his Grave, perform'd the last kind Offices, and and were no doubt the Chief Mourners at his Burial. Agreeable to this blessed Pattern, Christians have ever since with a becoming Seriousness and respectful Care, thought it to be their Duty as well as a piece of Humanity, to attend the Mortal Remains of their departed Brethren to their Long-Home.

Now the different Ways by which different Nations have performed these doleful Obsequies, is at present no very material Disquisition ; only we may observe in general, that the Politer part even of the Heathen World, usually entertain'd the People with a Funeral Oration, or a set Speech in Praise of the Dead, and a Feast generally concluded the whole Ceremony. The same Practice has extended also to the Christian World ; but with this superior difference, That whereas, their's was a Repast for their Bodies, our's is an Entertainment for our Souls : Our Orations, or Sermons at such times being useful Admonitions and Instructions for the Living, to put them in mind of their latter End, and to shew us that we are all in a little time to leave this World, in order to be gather'd to our Fathers. And this my Brethren, is the Occasion that at present calls us in this sorrowful manner to the House of God.

I shall at present entertain you with a Discourse of the Christian Victory over Death, deducible from the words I have read to you for my Text ; *O Death where is thy Sting ? O Grave where is thy Victory ?* And in the prosecution of this Design, I shall offer three things to your Consideration.

- I. I shall shew what it was that brought Death into the World, with the numerous train of Calamities and Miseries consequent thereupon.
- II. I shall shew how Death may in some measure be said to have gain'd a Conquest over Mankind.
- III. And Lastly, How We have in reality gain'd a Conquest over Death; and therefore in token of our Victory may break forth into Joy, and cry out in the Words before us, *O Death where is thy Sting? O Grave where is thy Victory?*

First I am to shew what it was that brought Death into the World, with all its Attendants of Calamities, and Miseries, and Woes. Now in order to do this, we must travel back to the Days of our Forefather *Adam*; to that Garden of Pleasure, the Scene of all our Sorrow; to that Tree of Knowledge, the Source of all our Ignorance; to that fatal Fruit, delicious indeed to the Eye and Palate, but conveying infallible Death to the unfortunate Taster. Whether it was a fond Curiosity of trying an Experiment what wou'd be the Effect of tasting the forbidden Fruit; or whether the ungrateful Imposition of Restraint stirr'd up his Appetite; or whatever secret Cause might enflame his Desires; Eat he most certainly did. And so by the Sin of that One Man Death enter'd into the World, and with it a Curse fell upon his Own Head; and not having it in his Power to cut off the Entail, it of course devolved upon all his Posterity,

And as Sin brought Death upon Man, so it is the poison'd Fountain that sends forth the bitter Streams of all the Evils we meet with in the World. All the Division and Disorder we observe in the several Kingdoms of the Earth, all the Diseases of our Bodies, and all the

Infirmities of our Minds, are still the Effects of this Disobedience. 'Tis this that infects the Air with noxious Vapours, and gives a keener and more destructive Edge to the Sword ; this is what gives Flame to Fevers, and Ice to the shivering Fits of Agues ; Dropsies from hence swell our Bodies beyond their due Proportion, and Consumptions shrink us into Skeletons. This is what turn'd Paradise (the Plantation of the Almighty) into a Garden of Affliction ; which from that time lost its primitive prolifick Vertue, and for the future grew fruitful in nothing but Thorns and Thistles. This was in short the true *Pandora's* Box, out of which have flown into the World whole Troops of Misfortunes, and every thing that is Evil.

O hapless condition of Man ! born indeed to be Happy, born to be Immortal ; and by one fatal Miscarriage reduced to the extremest Misery, and to the narrow scantling of a Span. Who is there amongst us so skill'd in the Power of Numbers, who so well vers'd in Arithmetick, as to be able to reckon up all the Variety of Fears and Cares, and disquietudes that are up in Arms against us ? Thro' every Stage of our Lives these Furies spread their destructive Venom, and are always ready at Hand to haunt and torment us.

What is our Infancy and Childhood but one continued Scene of Infirmities ? How comfortless, even beyond expression, is our condition at our first Entrance upon the Stage of Life ? How helpless are we for several Years after, if not supported by the charitable Hand of Somebody about us ? We are no sooner born but our Cheeks are bedew'd with Tears, and the first Voice we utter is Crying ; a sad presage of our ensuing Miseries. Let but the Mother, or the Nurse, withdraw her Care, and what becomes of this mighty *Nimrod*, this Lord of the Universe, as he stiles himself ?

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Let us advance one Step higher, and behold him in his Youth and riper Years. And this, if any, one wou'd think shou'd be the Golden Age of Ease, of Pleasure, and Satisfaction. Alas! it is quite otherwise! That Stage of Life being for the most part either a continual hurry of the Passions, or else a jovial Variety of sensual Delights. And indeed even those Pleasures and Diversions (if duly attended to) have something distastful in the very Enjoyment: Like some sort of Flowers, their too great Sweetness is offensive to us; tho', like Physick, they may be for our Health, yet there is something very disagreeable in their Composition.

And if our gay and blooming Days are not without their Sting, how shou'd we expect that our declining and wither'd Years shou'd be free? If our Youth is attended with Cares and Inconveniencies, 'tis more than probable that they will fall upon us with a double Portion in our Old Age; *when the evil Days come, and the Tears draw nigh, when we shall say (with Solomon) that we have no Pleasure in them.*

In a Word, 'twere utterly impossible to recount all the various Accidents and Misfortunes of the several Stages of our Lives to which this Sin, this fatal Apostacy of our Forefathers does betray and expose us. For there is no Time or Place, nothing we desire or Love, no Blessing or Comfort we enjoy, but what is embitter'd with some sort of Trouble, some Calamity or other. But besides all this; what a large Conquest has Death hereby gain'd over us? How vastly extended is his Empire? There is not a Limb, a Vein, or any single Part of our Bodies but is some way or other obnoxious to this all-conquering Tyrant. But this will more properly fall under the consideration of my next Head. Now I come in the Second place to shew,

II. How Death may in some sort be said to have gain'd a Victory over Mankind.

There never was any Universal Monarch upon Earth till Death erected his Standard. Tyrants and ambitious Princes have indeed been the Product of all Ages, and of all Countries: And some of these have been so fatally successful in their Designs, as to extend their Spoils and Devastations over the greatest part of the habitable World; but after all their vain-glorious Trophies, after all the Havock they have made amongst the Sons of Men, they have been forc'd at last to truckle to this Old and more Victorious Champion. These GRAND MONARQUES have at length exchanged their Thrones for a cold Grave, and have paid Obedience to Death's unlimited Dominion,

Crowns and Scepters dazle our Eyes 'tis true, and when we approach the Royal Presence we can do nothing but gaze and wonder. And yet the arbitrary Hand of Death will e'er long wrest the Scepter out of their Hands; he will dash their Crowns from their Heads, and bring down the greatest Kings upon a Level with the meanest Subject. I have said ye are God's (saith the Spirit of the Lord, by the Mouth of *David*) and then it immediately follows, But ye shall Die like Men. How does he seem to blow up their Vanity in his first Words? He exalts them even to Heaven; I have said ye are God's! But how sadly does he cool and take down their Pride in the Words that follow? But ye shall Die like Men. The Strong and the Mighty are but Dust, as well as the Weak and Feeble: Tho' they are lifted up on high above the rest of the World, yet

yet are they no less subject to Death than other Men ; their Breath must go forth, they must return to the Earth, and mingle Ashes with common and poorer Mortals.

Look into a Charnel House, and shew me if you can, which was a Beggar and which a King ; tell me if you there see any remarkable Distinction betwixt the Bones of the one, and the Bones of the other. Do you find that the Royal Dust of *David* is the more enrich'd for his dying when he was a King, than if he had died in the mean and humble Employment of a Shepherd ?

And if Death reigns thus triumphantly over Crowns and Thrones, those of an Inferiour Rank, whether Nobles or Peasants, whether Rich or Poor, must expect in their turns to go this way of all Flesh.

Step into the Houses of great Men ; behold what glittering Pomp immediately strikes your admiring Eyes : See how the very Walls are enrich'd with Figures of deceas'd Heros, and with a long train of painted Ancestry. Do but stay a while and perhaps you may see the Scene strangely changed : The present Owner of all this gawdy Show may chance to have his LAST SUMMONS ; and how amazing an Alteration will then appear ? Instead of a gilded Palace, you will see nothing but a dark House of Sorrow ; instead of the pleasing Variety of Paintings and Tapestry, the Rooms all hung with the black Livery of Death, and fill'd with the sad Solemnity of MOURNERS.

Shou'd you retire from hence, and step into the nearest Cottage ; you will there probably find the Good-Man of the House of a robust and healthy Body. He is enured to Labour and Exercise ; he has Arms of Brass, his Bones are like Bars of Iron, and he seems to be built for many Years. Alas ! a Feaver will quickly make him as feeble and helpless as he was in the greenest

est Years of his Infancy; and an Hour, or quicker Minute may tumble him into his Grave.

In short, Death you see has an unbounded Empire; his all conquering Sword cuts it's way thro' all the Sons of Men. 'Tis neither Greatness nor Goodness, 'tis neither Vertue nor Beauty that can give a Protection from inexorable Fate. If these wou'd have avail'd, the Lady here before us had not Died; If to be Great and Good were a security, the World had still been blest with that Great good Man her Brother; or if Vertue cou'd have warded off the Blow, we shou'd not so lately have met in this Place to lament the Death of the Mother. These three excellent Persons we have lost in a very little time: And when the Strokes of Providence fall so thick upon us, one wou'd almost be tempted to invert the Sense of the Text, and to cry out, O Death thou hast a Sting; O Grave thou hast indeed obtain'd a Victory.

In a Word, and to have done with this Head. If therefore we will take the Apostles Words in their literal Sense and genuine Signification, we must enlarge our Prospect beyond the Grave, and look forwards to Immortality. And this brings me to my Third Head, where I am to shew.

III. How we have in reality gain'd a Conquest over Death; and therefore in token of our Victory may break forth into Joy, and say in the Words before us, *O Death where is thy Sting? O Grave where is thy Victory?*

Behold with what an Emphasis the Apostle seems to express himself. He had been speaking just before what a blessed Change wou'd ensue upon the Resurrection of the Body; and in contemplation of the grand Mystery seems again to be caught up to the third Heaven, and in his holy Triumph breaks out into a Rapture and
 Extasy

Extasy of Joy ; O Death where is thy Sting ? O Grave where is thy Victory.

Death and the Grave had indeed utterly Overcome Mankind ; but by the Resurrection of our Saviour the Last Enemy, is at length subdued, and Death is swallow'd up in Victory. Our Blessed Lord has now sweeten'd our putrified and corrupted Bodies ; he has perfumed and Sanctified the Habitations of the Dead, and enlightned all the gloomy Corners of the Grave. The Tomb is now but the Gate of Death, a Thorowfare to Eternal Life, a dark, but safe Passage to Immortality. Had not our Lord risen from his Bed of Earth, had he not led Captivity Captive, we shou'd have been always under the power of this grim King of Terrors. But since Christ is become the *First-fruits of them that Sleep* ; since the Head cou'd not be held in the Bonds and Prison of the Grave, we that are the Members shall also in due time break forth from the Dust, from those Regions of Darkness into the glorious Kingdom of Light and Liberty.

Had we lived before our Saviour's time ; and had our Curiosity prompted us to have gone down into a Sepulcher, and to have look'd into the Closets of the Dead ; upon viewing those dismal Spectacles of Corruption, those mouldy Remains of Mortality, we shou'd have had but small hopes that such confused Heaps of Ashes wou'd ever again have risen up into the beautiful Frame of Man : Little Sign wou'd there have appear'd, that those fallen Tabernacles of Flesh wou'd ever have been rebuilt more fresh and lasting than ever. But, blessed be God, the deformed and ugly Monster Death is now not so frightful to a good Christian : We can now view the Valley of Dry-Bones without starting at the Spectre. We can't indeed help shewing
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ing a pious Concern at such ghastly Sight; but this is rather the Effect of our Human Frailty, than of our Christian Hope; by the Former we see Nature in her Undress; by the Latter we behold her ready to be clothed with Immortality.

Since therefore our Lives are so precarious, as has been shewn in the former part of this Discourse; since every Period of them is liable to some Inconveniency, to some Difficulty or other; And since Death is only to put an end to all these; Where is then his Sting? Where is then his Victory? If to set us free from Slavery, if to take off our Fetters be to Overcome and Vanquish, he has indeed gained a Conquest; but who would not run to meet such a welcome Conqueror?

When a good Christian takes a just Survey of all this, the Passage to the next World will not appear to be so rough and uncouth as is generally represented. What tho' his Body must die and turn to Dust, so long as he is in due time to receive it again Immortal and Glorious(Tho' it must be sown in Corruption, it shall one Day be rais'd in Incorruption; tho' 'tis sown in Dishonour, it shall be rais'd in Glory; tho' 'tis sown in Weakness, it shall be rais'd in Power; tho' 'tis sown a Natural Body, it shall be rais'd a Spiritual Body: This is our Victory, this is our Rejoycing. Blessed be God, our Consolation is inexpressibly great: This Life is but short, and so will consequently its Troubles be also; and after we have lain a while in the Earth, we shall spring up afresh, and shall come forth Refined and Glorified. Then shall we enter into the Heavenly *Canaan*; into a State where there will be no more Sorrow, no more Pain, and where all
Tears

Tears will be wiped from our Eyes. And what is above all this, we shall be admitted to the Beatifick Vision; we shall see God himself, who will bid us Welcome to his Kingdom with this Joyful Eugé, *Well done ye Good and Faithful Servants; Ye have fought the Good Fight, ye have obtain'd the Victory, and your Reward shall be an everlasting Crown of Glory.*

I have now done with my Text; but must implead your Patience for a Minute or two longer, whilst I pay my last Tribute to the Memory of the Departed Lady, in a short Account of her Life and Conversation.

You all very well know her Extraction, therefore I shall not trespass upon your time with fruitless Encomiums of her Birth and Parentage: It is enough that I tell You she was of the Illustrious Family of the NOELS. Her Father Dying when she was very Young, left the Business of her Education to her Mother; who took care to instill those early Rays of Piety into her tender Years, which were all along so eminently conspicuous in her riper Age. The quickness of her Natural Sense and Parts may be easily guess'd at, by the early Progress she made in the Latin Tongue; but that being look'd upon as too Pedantick a Language for her Sex, she applied herself to a more Fashionable Speech, I mean the French. And in this she grew so great a Proficient, as (upon Occasion) to write it correctly, and to speak it with Fluency and Elegancy; as the Natives themselves have declared. She took no small delight in reading of History: But the natural Sweetness of her Temper inclin'd

her in a more particular manner to the soft Harmony of Poetry; and she had herself no ill-natur'd Muse. But however excellent a Vein she might have that way, she did not Dig and Cultivate the rich Mine; she made it her Diversion now and then, but not her Study and Employment.

As to the outward Habit of the Body, she was Tall, and of a very graceful Mien. Nor was she less Amiable in her Conversation, than in her Person, being of a courteous and affable Disposition. She was naturally Civil and Obliging, and by a genteel Familiarity (peculiar to herself) she at once engaged the Esteem and Admiration of all that knew her.

And as to the Inward Habit of her Soul; Her Religion was that of the Church of *England*, of which there needs no other Proof than her constant Attendance upon its Service. Her Charity to the Poor was even beyond her Ability: And I more than once have hear'd her declare, that She thought it the greatest Pleasure in the World to relieve the Neccessitous. She was always ready to Pardon, never to do an Injury. And if she happen'd to be Offended at any time, her Anger was but a Flash; it shined perhaps a little, but did not break out into a Flame: Like the faint Light of those Vapours we sometimes behold in the Night, that look bright and luminous, but have not Heat enough to do Mischief.

To do Good was in short the Sum of her Religion. She made no Pharisaical Outward shew of it; but her Good Works plainly told us that they flow'd from a sound and good Faith, and that She was plentifully stored with Inward Piety. And certainly that Life is spent in the Service of God, that is spent in Mercy and Charity, in Compassion and Forgiveness.

But

But tho' the Faculties of her Soul were thus sound and healthy, her Body was not so. For some Years before her last Sickness she was afflicted with almost continual Pains in her Head; and sometimes to that Degree as to throw her into Convulsions, which were often succeeded by a long and severe Fit of Illness: Of late these Fits came thick upon her; and by their Violence and Frequency made a visible Decay in her Constitution. Nature cou'd no longer bear up against such repeated Shocks; the tottering Vessel cou'd not for ever resist the Impetuosity of returning Storms: She is at length cast upon her last Bed, and her habitual Illness is now seconded by a languishing Distemper, and a lingring Passage to Glory.

And here give me leave to draw back her Curtains, and look upon her as she lies weak and feeble upon her Dying Bed.

When Death began to look her in the Face, she shew'd no over-fearful Uneasiness at his Approach. Nature we know will start at her Dissolution; and the two Old Friends the Soul and the Body will shew some Reluctancy at their Separation. This may be exemplified from the great Aversion any two intimate Acquaintance or Relations are apt to entertain at the thoughts of Parting from each other. With what a tender regret have I sometimes beheld (in the Business of my Function) the last dying, farewell Kiss betwixt a Husband and a Wife, betwixt a Brother and a Sister, betwixt a Parent and a Child? With what concern have I seen a disconsolate Mother cast her Arms about her departing Infant? With what Floods of Tears has she bedew'd the innocent, beloved, expiring Babe? And if it be so amongst Friends and Relations at their Parting; the intimate Union that is betwixt the

the Soul and the Body, will not be dissolved without some Aversion and Dislike. In like manner, if this our departed Sister was willing to Live, it was with an humble Resignation to the Will of God; and in expectation of his Determination, she was no less willing to Die.

She had the Prayers of the Church frequently read in her Room; and, not long before she died, receiv'd the Blessed Sacrament as a safe Pass-port to the New *Jerusalem*, where she is now arrived.

Her old Companion her Goodness attended her to the very last; the same Tenderness for her Servants and People about her. And she gave orders her self, some few Nights before she expired, who shou'd take their turns to sit up with her; for fear lest the too frequent Watchings for her Health, might endanger their own.

At length the fatal Minute is come: Lo! she faints, she is Speechless, she is Dying! And it pleas'd God to give her an easy Passage. There were no Shrieks to be heard, that shew'd the horrors of a distracted Soul; no Distortion of Limbs, nor Struglings of the Body, that shew'd that Death was either frightful or painful to her; But she resign'd up her Life quietly into his Hands that gave it, and her last Breath was a gentle Sigh.

Thus Died this Vertuous, this Compassionate, and much Lamented Lady; snatch'd away in the Flower of her Age, and before she had seen half the Days the Royal Psalmist has allotted us. Where is that Majestick Appearance that used to fill us with a secret Awe and Reverence? Where is that sweetness of Temper, which at the same time engaged the Hearts of all that beheld her? 'Tis all departed! Except the faint and languid Image which still lives in the Minds of all that
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knew her: All her Pomp and Grandure lies here before us, reduced to the poor Remains of a Velvet Pall and Painted Scutcheon; which serve for no other use but to convey her Corps to the Earth, that it may be a more decent Repast for the Worms.

But let us drier our Eyes, and cease our fruitless Lamentation. Let us consider that the Hand of Providence that order'd her untimely End, design'd it for a Stroke of Mercy. The God whom she serv'd has indeed cut her Days short; but then we must consider that he has also shorten'd the part she wou'd have born in the Troubles of a longer Life. By losing a further share of this Perishing World, she has the sooner gain'd a share in the Blessings of the Eternal one. Blessed Change! Mortal and Transitory Things exchanged for Immortal and never fading Glories.

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